

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3995

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INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 1617

USIA FOR ILA

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NU

SUBJECT: GON IMPOSES CENSORSHIP ON ALL MEDIA

1. SUMMARY: THE NATIONAL GOVERNING COUNCIL APRIL 24 ISSUED A DECREE IMPOSING CENSORSHIP ON ALL INFORMATION MEDIA UNTIL THE CURRENT STRIKE ACTIVITY CEASES. OPPOSITION LA PRENSA APPEARED APRIL 25 AFTER MILITARY CENSORS ELIMINATED ALL STRIKE RELATED ARTICLES AND ITS EDITORIAL. NOVEDADES ALTHOUGH REPORTEDLY CENSORED PUBLISHED SEVERAL ARTICLES ATTACKING LABOR UNION STRIKE ACTIVITY. RADIO HAD ALREADY BEEN INFORMALLY CENSORED UNDER SEPARATE MEASURES BUT TV, WHICH HAD BROADCAST STRIKE NEWS, WILL NOW COME UNDER BAN. CENSORSHIP OF LA PRENSA BREAKS WITH LONG ESTABLISHED PRECEDENTS. FOUR PRIOR INSTANCES OF LA PRENSA
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CENSORSHIP IN PAST 20 YEARS HAD BEEN CONNECTED WITH ACTUAL OR

ATTEMPTED VIOLENCE AND GENERAL SOMOZA HAD NEVER CENSORED ARCH-RIVAL CHAMORRO SINCE HIS ACCESSION TO POWER IN 1967 DESPITE HIS CONSTANT ATTACKS. NOVEDADES WAS CENSORED BY SOMOZA HIMSELF FOR ONE DAY IN JANUARY 1973. ALTHOUGH LABOR UNREST AND LA PRENSA'S TROUBLEMAKING ROLE ARE PRIME FACTORS MOTIVATING GON'S MOVE. RECENT SERIOUS LA PRENSA ATTACK ON THE GUARD, GON AND SOMOZA AND HISTORICAL RESORT TO RESTRAINTS ON MEDIA, INCLUDING CENSORSHIP, DURING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PERIODS ALSO APPEAR TO FIGURE IN DECISION. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 24 THE NATIONAL GOVERNING COUNCIL ISSUED A DECREE ESTABLISHING "THE CENSORSHIP OF ALL MEANS OF PUBLICITY SPOKEN, WRITTEN

AND TELEVISED." APPLICATION OF THE DECREE IS CONFINED TO THE NATIONAL DISTRICT BECAUSE IT IS BASED ON MARTIAL LAW POWERS AND SUSPENSION OF CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES WHICH HAVE BEEN IN EFFECT IN MANAGUA SINCE THE DECEMBER, 1972 EARTHQUAKE. CENSORSHIP MEASURES ARE TO BE IN FORCE AS LONG AS "THE CAUSES MOTIVATING THEM EXIST." THE CAUSES GIVEN IN A PREAMBLE TO THE DECREE ARE THE SEVEN-WEEK OLD MEDICAL STRIKE AND THE RASH OF SUPPORTING STRIKES WHICH HAVE BROKEN OUT IN PAST FEW DAYS. A TRANSLATION OF THE FULL TEXT THE DECREE AND REPORT ON THE RELATED STRIKE UNREST ARE BEING SENT SEPTEL.

3. FIRST NEWS OF THE CENSORSHIP ACTION BROKE MORNING APRIL 25 WHEN MANAGUA POLICE JUDGE AND NATIONAL GUARD POLICE APPEARED AT OPPOSITION LA PRENSA TO INSTALL GUARD MAJOR FROM OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND GUARD LIEUTENANT FROM OFFICE OF NATIONAL SECURITY, BOTH OF WHOM HAVE LAW DEGREES, AS OFFICIAL CENSORS. LA PRENSA PUBLISHER PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO TOLD EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE CENSORS CAREFULLY EXAMINED ENTIRE NEWSPAPER LAID OUT FOR PRINTING AND ELIMINATED FULL TEXT OF ALL ARTICLES DEALING WITH STRIKE ACTIVITY.

HIS DAILY EDITORIAL WHICH MENTIONED STRIKES AND SEVERAL OTHER ARTICLES

WHICH CHAMORRO MAINTAINS DEALT WITH SUBJECTS OTHER THAN STRIKES. NEWSPAPER WAS THEN ALLOWED TO PRINT APRIL 25 ISSUE WITH FRONTPAGE BANNER HEADLINE DECLARING "LA PRENSA CENSORED" AND SEVERAL ARTICLES WHICH COULD BE REGARDED AS "POLITICALLY SENSITIVE." CHAMORRO SAID THAT RELEASE OF PAPER WAS EMBARGOED UNTIL NATIONAL SECURITY LIEUTENANT TOOK COPY TO "EL RETIRO", GENERAL SOMOZA'S HEADQUARTERS. CONFIDENTIAL

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BY AFTERNOON APRIL 25 PAPER WAS RELEASED FOR DISTRIBUTION.

4. ALTHOUGH A NATIONAL GUARD CAPTAIN WAS REPORTEDLY ON DUTY AS CENSOR IN THE SOMOZA-OWNED NOVEDADES, ITS APRIL 25 ISSUE INDICATES THAT HIS TOUCH WAS RATHER LIGHT. THE NEWSPAPER APPEARED WITH THREE LENGTHY ARTICLES THAT ARE DEFINITELY STRIKE RELATED: ONE UNDER THE HEADLINE "SCAAS (THE COMMUNIST CONTROLLED CONSTRUCTION UNION) VIOLATES

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT"; ANOTHER SUB-HEADED "POLITICAL STRIKES MISLEAD WORKERS"; AND ANOTHER HEADER DECLARING "SCAAS TRYING TO CREATE CHAOS."

5. CENSORSHIP OF LA PRENSA BREAKS SOME LONG STANDING PRECEDENTS. FIRST, ALTHOUGH NEWSPAPER WAS PREVIOUSLY CENSORED ON FIVE DIFFERENT OCCASIONS THESE WERE ALL IN CONNECTION WITH ACTUAL OR ATTEMPTED VIOLENCE (THE 1954 ASSASSINATION PLOT AGAINST GENERAL SOMOZA GARCIA, THE 1956 ASSASSINATION OF SOMOZA GARCIA, THE 1959 "OLAMA Y MOLLEJONES" INVASION OVERTHROW ATTEMPT, AND THE BLOODY JANUARY 22, 1967 ELECTION CAMPAIGN INCIDENT IN MANAGUA). SECOND, IT IS THE FIRST TIME SINCE HIS ACCESSION TO POWER IN 1967 THAT GENERAL ANASTASIO SOMOZA DEBAYLE HAS CENSORED HIS ARCH-RIVAL CHAMORRO; A FACT WHICH HERETOFORE HE HAS CONSISTENTLY NOTED WITH SOME PRIDE, ESPECIALLY TO FOREIGN OBSERVERS. NOVEDADES WAS PREVIOUSLY CENSORED ONLY ONCE (FOR A TWENTY-FOUR PERIOD IN JANUARY 1973), IRONICALLY BY GENERAL SOMOZA DEBAYLE HIMSELF (SEE MANAGUA 764, JANUARY 23, 1973).

6. THE CENSORSHIP DECREE WILL HAVE LITTLE PRACTICAL EFFECT ON RADIO SINCE STRIKE NEWS WAS ALREADY BEING INFORMALLY BANNED UNDER THE RADIO AND TV CODE BY GUARD MAJOR LUNA, ALTHOUGH SOME RADIO NEWS BROADCASTS WERE GINGERLY STEPPING OVER THE LINE. TELEVISION NEWS, WHICH HAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED ITS AUDIENCE SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE, HAS BEEN CARRYING SOME STRIKE NEWS BUT WILL NOW APPARENTLY CEASE DOING SO.

7. COMMENT: LABOR UNREST AND THE TROUBLEMAKING ROLE PLAYED BY LA PRENSA ARE UNDOUBTEDLY PRIME FACTORS IN MOTIVATING THE GON TO TAKE MEASURE AS SERIOUS AND POTENTIALLY DAMAGING TO ITS REPUTATION AS CENSORSHIP OF ALL MEDIA. HOWEVER, SOME OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONSIDERATIONS APPEAR TO HAVE GIVEN IMPETUS TO THE MOVE. ON APRIL 23, PUBLISHER CHAMORRO RAN AN EDITORIAL CONTAINING TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS FROM AN ARTICLE THAT APPEARED IN THE DECEMBER 7, 1973
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